

Message Text

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TAGS: SA, US, PFOR

SUBJECT: BRIEFING OF SAUDI EDITORS

1. SENIOR EMBASSY OFFICERS AND I MET YESTERDAY (JAN 19) WITH THE EDITORS OF FOUR MAJOR SAUDI PAPERS FOR LUNCH AND AN EXTENSIVE OFF-THE-RECORD AND INFORMAL TALK. THE SECRETARY'S "BUSINESS WEEK" INTERVIEW AND PRESIDENT FORD'S REACTION FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN THE DISCUSSION.

2. WE TOLD THEM THE QUESTION ASKED THE SECRETARY WAS HYPOTHETICAL AND PERHAPS SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. BUT SHOULD THERE REALLY HAVE BEEN ANY SURPRISE AT HIS RESPONSE? COULD THE SECRETARY OR THE PRESIDENT HAVE ANSWERED, "NO, IF WE ARE BEING STRANGLED WE WILL SIMPLY ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE KILLED?" IF THEY HAD SAID THAT THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM OFFICE.

3. THE NEWSMEN ALSO ASKED ABOUT SECRETARY SCHLESINGER'S STATEMENT ABOUT OUR ABILITY TO OCCUPY THE OIL FIELDS. HERE WE REPLIED THAT HE HAD MERELY REPEATED A TRUISM. COULD ANYONE HAVE ANY DOUBT ABOUT OUR ABILITY TO OCCUPY ARABIA OR ALMOST ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD IF WE WANTED TO? THE

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PROPER QUESTION SHOULD HAVE BE: WOULD WE WANT TO?

WHY WOULD WE WANT TO? AND WHAT WOULD WE FIND IF WE DID? ALL THOSE WHO KNEW HOW MIDDLE EAST OIL FIELDS OPERATED ALSO KNEW THAT WE WOULD FIND SMOKING RUINS. BUT, AS SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD SAID, IF NATIONS ARE FORCED INTO DESPERATE POSITIONS, THEY, LIKE CATS, WILL TAKE DESPERATE ACTIONS.

4. THE THIRD QUESTION WAS ON OUR VARIOUS REFERENCES TO THE NECESSITY OF TAKING THE SOVIET UNION INTO ACCOUNT IN OUR PLANNING. WOULD NOT THIS IMPLY, THEY ASKED, THAT THE SOVIET UNION WAS THE ULTIMATE GUARANTOR OF THE ARABS? HERE OUR RESPONSE WAS THAT WE HAD TO TAKE THE SOVIET UNION INTO ACCOUNT IN EVERYTHING WE DID, AS THEY TOOK US INTO ACCOUNT IN ALL THEIR ACTIONS. BUT AS FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THE SOVIET UNION WOULD PLAY A VANISHINGLY SMALL ROLE. ONLY THE UNITED STATES, NOT THE SOVIET UNION, WAS IN A POSITION TO PERSUADE ISRAEL TO MOVE FROM THE ARAB LANDS.

5. ALTHOUGH NONE OF THIS WAS INNOVATIVE OR SURPRISING, THE NEWSMEN CONSIDERED THE MEETING HIGHLY IMPORTANT AND NEWSWORTHY. THEY ASKED WHY THE SAME EXPLANATIONS HAD NOT BEEN MADE ELSEWHERE IN THE ARAB WORLD. WE ASSUMED THEY HAD BEEN, AND TOLD THE SAUDIS WE WONDERED ON OUR SIDE WHY THE ARABS AND OTHERS IN OPEC HAD REACTED SO STRONGLY TO SUCH OBVIOUS AND SUCH ROUTINE STATEMENTS.

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